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ABSTRACT

This report provides an overview of the federally funded State Improvement Grants (SIGs). Information was obtained from the 17 individual state profiles compiled for the Regional Resource Center Network SIG Report. Results of the analysis found: (1) 18 states were awarded SIGs in 1999 and the average SIG award was $1,002,949; (2) recruitment and retention of personnel is a goal or priority area in more than half of the funded states (n=11); (3) the most common product planned by 12 of the grantee states as a result of the grant is information about effective curricular and instructional practices that are research based; (4) multi-state credentialing is the most frequent interstate connection to be made during the 5-year SIG period; (5) states plan to implement innovative and diverse staff development activities including leadership institutes, training based on local needs assessments, symposiums, training linked to ongoing technical assistance, and new technology; (6) every grantee reported an informal or formal partnership between the state education agency and parent training and information centers; and (7) all grantees have some type of SIG advisory or oversight group that will also serve a partnership function. An appendix includes a list of states and award amounts. (CR)

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DIRECTORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION, INC.

QUICK TURN AROUND

PROJECT FORUM

QTA – A BRIEF ANALYSIS IF A CRITICAL ISSUE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

ISSUE: STATE IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

SEPTEMBER 1999

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Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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Quick Turn Around

Project FORUM

QTA - a brief analysis of a critical issue in special education

Issue: State Improvement Grants **Date: September 1999**

Purpose

The purpose of this *Quick Turn-Around* (QTA) is to provide a brief overview of the funded State Improvement Grants (SIGs). It is intended to complement the following, more detailed, SIG analyses:

- The Regional Resource Center (RRC) Network prepared individual state profiles of the funded SIGs that provide *information about products and activities*. Contact Person: Jane Storms (WRRC, 541-346-0354)
- The Federal Resource Center for Special Education, Academy for Educational Development (AED), in collaboration with the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), summarized the *needs identified by State Education Agencies* that submitted applications, both funded and unfunded. Contact Person: Michele Rovins (FRC, 202-884-8210)
- The RMC Research Corporation independently analyzed 10 funded SIG applications and identified *evaluation strategies and approaches* (i.e., key concepts, strategies, and components). Contact Person: Beverly Mattson (RMC, 888-762-4200 or http://www.rmcres.com)

Federal Legislation

In order to support and encourage comprehensive strategies to improve educational results for students with disabilities, Congress provided a SIG program within the 1997 Amendments to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The overall purpose of the SIG Program is:

> *...to assist State educational agencies, and their partners referred to in section 652(b), in reforming and improving their systems for providing educational, early intervention, and transitional services, including their systems for professional development, technical assistance, and dissemination of knowledge about best practices to improve results for children with disabilities.* [20 U.S.C.§145152(b)]

Project FORUM Analysis

Information for this QTA was obtained from the 17 individual state profiles compiled for the RRC Network SIG Report.[1] These profiles were analyzed and synthesized by Project FORUM staff to provide a quick scan across the SIG projects. Readers are encouraged to review the more comprehensive RRC Report for expanded information about the grantee states.

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[1] The Georgia application was not available, but the abstract was reviewed.

This document is available in alternative formats. For details, please contact Project FORUM staff at 703-519-3800 (voice) or 7008 (TDD).

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SIG Awards

Eighteen State Education Agencies (SEAs) were awarded SIGs in 1999, the first competition. The funded states are geographically distributed across the nation, with at least one state within the boundaries of each RRC. The average SIG award was $1,002,949, with a range from $500,000 (Vermont) to $1,840,000 (California). See Appendix A for a listing of states and award amounts.

SIG Goals and Priorities

A review of the SIG applications indicated that recruitment and retention of personnel (including teacher mentoring programs) is a goal or priority area in more than half of the funded states (n=11). Nearly as common are improvements in professional development/inservice, noted by 10 states. For example, professional development priorities are focusing on research-based practices, emphasizing high expectations and challenging standards, linked to school reform, and coordinated with technical assistance. Seven states noted improved academic and behavioral skills of students as a goal or priority area. All goals or priorities identified by at least two funded states are listed in Appendix B.

Products or Outcomes

The states described a number of products to be developed throughout the five-year SIG grant period. The most common product, planned by 12 of the grantee states, is information about effective curricular and instructional practices that are research based. These have been described as guidelines, summaries, and plans. Recruitment and retention information and materials are planned by nine states. In eight grantee states, products will include staff development models and curricula (e.g., distance learning courses, professional development schools, interdisciplinary training content, and parameters for involvement of other agencies). See Appendix C for a list of products planned by states listed in the RRC profiles.

Interstate Connections

A review of the RRC state profiles revealed that multi-state credentialing is the most frequent interstate connection to be made during the five-year SIG period (presented in five state applications). A result of these efforts will be expanded certification reciprocity between states and increased teacher recruitment strategies.

Partnerships with out-of-state Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) are being designed to increase the cultural diversity of teaching candidates, as well as to recruit hard to find personnel (e.g., occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech therapists). Within the five year grant period, SIGs will create or continue temporary exchanges of graduate students for hard-to-recruit or hard-to-fill positions. There will also be distance education arrangements, including on-line academies in areas such as orientation and mobility, paraprofessional training, and behavior management/positive behavior support.

Some SIG grantees will create interstate connections for training in Braille and sight-saving techniques. In addition, interstate leadership training will be carried out. The sharing of resources for health impaired and medically fragile students, and technology are

also examples of interstate connections to be continued and/or expanded through the SIGS.

Strategies to Meet SIG Goals & Priorities

The states are proposing to use a range of strategies to meet their SIG goals and priorities. The 17 states reviewed plan to implement innovative and diverse staff development/training activities including leadership institutes, training based on local needs assessments, symposiums, training linked to ongoing technical assistance and new technology (e.g., distance learning, CDs, and web pages).

The second most frequent SIG activity, planned by seven states, involves carrying out innovative and targeted recruitment activities (e.g., stipends, scholarships, student mentoring in high schools, incentives for reaching full certification, paid school-based internships, and recruitment of persons of color and those with a disability).

Innovative dissemination will be a major activity within at least six states. Dissemination activities to be utilized include clearinghouses and other activities to create a bank of information about research-based instructional strategies, use of web pages, use of other technology, and infusion of SIG information into existing statewide newsletters. Six state applications describe specific agreements (i.e., contacts and grants) with colleges, universities, and University Affiliated Programs (UAPs) to carry out specific SIG activities. Accountability activities were also reported by at least six states (e.g., revision of state monitoring, implementation of continuous improvement strategies, and use of quantitative and qualitative data for program improvement).

Appendix D contains a list of strategies to meet SIG goals and priorities.

Partnership Strategies

The SIG applications contain considerable detail about the type and nature of formal and informal partnerships, and reflect a commitment to improving student outcomes through these partnerships. In response to federal requirements, every grantee state reported an informal or formal partnership between the SEA and Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs). Examples are subcontracts for defined collaborative activities; co-training activities; co-dissemination activities; or participation by PTI staff on SIG advisory councils, management committees, or other groups.

All of the 17 states have some type of SIG advisory or oversight group (e.g., management teams, steering committees, or advisory councils) that will also serve a partnership function. The intent of these groups is to periodically review the progress of the SIG and to make recommendations regarding needed change. For example, Michigan has formed a Partnership Management Team to coordinate the implementation of their SIG project, and Utah has formed the Special Education Partners Consortium to play that role.

Consistent with federal requirements, the 17 proposals reviewed described formal and informal partnerships with local education agencies (LEAs). These partnerships include incentive funds provided by the SEA to implement specific SIG activities. Following are four state examples:

- *Maryland* is requiring that LEAs align their federal discretionary resources with

SIG activities and is utilizing a Committee on Priorities that involves various partners in the review of student and program data to help formulate SIG priorities.

- *Idaho* is utilizing a Career Lattice Committee of partners to assist in the revision of professional and paraprofessional standards and competency-based training, as well as using university and SEA partners to train an LEA to assist with accountability reviews.
- The *Kansas* SEA has a partnership with the University of Kansas for on-line training. SIG-supported training is also being provided through SEA partnerships with 12 Educational Service Centers.
- *Hawaii* will use professional development teams made up of university and practitioner partners to play a major role in providing training and technical assistance in the implementation of school-based interagency services for children with disabilities.

Other frequently-described partnerships in the SIG applications are formal and informal agreements with in-state UAPs or IHEs.

Type of Contracts/Subcontracts

A commonly described practice is the use of one or more major contractors to manage and/or carry out portions of the SIG work scope. The states also plan to use contracts/subcontracts for third party evaluations of their projects. Consistent with federal requirements, the primary type of contract/subcontract will involve IHEs and PTIs. There will also be contractual arrangements with vocational rehabilitation and other agencies, and teacher education unions. These contracts or subcontracts relate closely to formal agreements made during the planning of the SIG application.

Other contracts or subcontracts noted in the SIG applications involve organizations and entities such as the National Center for Educational Outcomes, UAPs, universities in neighboring states, or individual consultants (e.g., trainers, product developers, and researchers).

SEAs are also issuing requests for competitive proposals or non-competitive grants to LEAs to carry out SIG-related work. Examples include:

- Continuous improvement activities
- Recruitment efforts
- Retention activities (e.g., mentoring of new teachers)
- Activities to address challenging behaviors
- Linking IEPs with the general education curriculum
- Programs or initiatives to improve reading, language, or math skills

Pooling of SIG Resources with Other Sources

In the federal request for proposals (RFP), SEAs were encouraged to pool and leverage SIG resources with other funding sources that might result in coordinated reform efforts and overall systems change. At least 12 states are utilizing IDEA funds from Part B Discretionary, Part C Early Childhood, Part D National Activities, or LEA capacity-building grants ("sliver funding") to support or expand SIG work scopes. States also plan to combine SIG resources with other federal programs such as the Eisenhower Program, Goals 2000, School-to-Work and Carl Perkins Programs, and the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program within the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act in order to expand these efforts for students with disabilities.

States such as Maryland, Hawaii, Missouri, and California report that state funds will be used to supplement SIG resources. In Missouri, SIG funds will be leveraged with three state-supported initiatives—A+, Accelerated Schools, and Regional Professional Development Centers. Maryland's SIG is also aligned with the state's expanding network of Professional Development Schools, which is Maryland's main strategy for the redesign and reform of teacher education.

SIG funds are also expanding the capacity of other state or federally funded projects (e.g., increasing numbers of implementation sites, increasing numbers of personnel trained, or adding materials or travel support). Examples include:

- California - Beginning Teacher Support and Assistance Program
- Kansas - Academy for Translating Research into Practice in Personnel Preparation
- Michigan - Assistive Technology Clearinghouse
- Missouri - Teacher Center for Special Education
- Virginia - George Mason University Stepping Stone technology project

Another common example of the pooling of resources is in-kind support from PTIs, IHEs, or other SIG partner agencies. This in-kind support involves participation in advisory groups, management teams, special work groups, and SIG meetings.

Concluding Remarks

As indicated within this QTA, there is a wide range of creative strategies and collaborative activities that will be implemented within the SIG funded states during the 5-year grant period. These efforts are designed to create systems change leading to better program and student outcomes. Recruitment, retention, and professional development are clear themes within the 17 SIG applications and RRC state profiles reviewed.

A federal RFP has been recently issued to support a second round of SIGS within the states. The SIG program offers great opportunities for states to leverage other funding sources and statewide initiatives to create needed system changes with the goal of improving programs and services and outcomes for students with disabilities.

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IDEAs that Work
U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

Appendix A
1999 SIG Awards by State

State	Award Level	State	Award Level
Vermont	$ 500,000	Alabama	$ 1,025,000
Utah	$ 578,551	Georgia	$ 1,060,000
New Hampshire	$ 600,000	Maryland	$ 1,095,000
Hawaii	$ 600,000	Missouri	$ 1,145,000
Idaho	$ 625,000	Virginia	$ 1,240,000
Iowa	$ 875,526	Ohio	$ 1,320,000
Kansas	$ 900,000	Pennsylvania	$ 1,320,000
Kentucky	$1,000,000	Michigan	$ 1,320,000
Massachusetts	$1,009,000	California	$ 1,840,000

Appendix B
Goal or Priorities of the Funded SIG Applications by Two or More States

Goals or Priorities	Number of States
• Recruitment and retention of qualified special education personnel	11
• Professional development/inservice	10
• Improved academic and behavioral skills	7
• Inclusion of students with disabilities within state and local accountability system system	6
• Improved/strengthened pre-service training (e.g., aligned with standards, focused on research-based practices, restructured formats, and additional training program in hard to recruit areas such as OT/PT, and speech therapy/pathology)	6 6
• Increased school completion/reduced dropout rates	4
• Involvement of students with disabilities within alternative assessments	4
• Expansion of partnerships	4
• Access to the general education curriculum	3
• Emphasis on literacy	3
• Early intervention	3
• Transition/post school outcomes	3
• Enhanced parent involvement	3
• Certification standards	3
• Enhanced school/family/community partnerships	2
• Staff development for general education teachers and principals	2
• Diversification of special education personnel	2
• Implementation of research-based practices	2
• Coordination/integration of services	2
• Effective management of the SIG	2
• Continuous Improvement Model for planning and program development	2
• Inclusion/natural environments	2
• Effective IEP implementation	2
• Dissemination of information	2
• Increased state and school capacity to foster high student outcomes	2
• Reduction of suspension/expulsions	2

Appendix C
Examples of Products to be Developed by State SIG Projects

Type or Topic	Number of States
• Effective curricular and instructional practices that are research-based	12
• Recruitment and retention (e.g., information and materials)	9
• Staff development models, strategies, and curriculum	8
• Improved accountability and monitoring tools (e.g., monitoring coordinated with accreditation, common monitoring across agencies, data used for program improvement, protocols, and Continuous Improvement approaches)	7
• Web pages (e.g., IEPs, information regarding standards, parent participation effective school improvement, and reading methods	6
• Personnel standards, staff competencies, and changing roles and responsibilities	5
• Paraprofessional roles, guidelines, competencies, responsibilities, and career ladders	4
• Transition training materials, guidelines, technology infusion, & interagency roles	4
• School-wide discipline, behavior management, positive behavior supports and safe schools (e.g., information and training content/modules)	4
• Assessment, alternative assessment, and accommodations (e.g., information and training content regarding exemplary models, data collection methods, format, and protocols)	4
• Evaluation (e.g., consumer satisfaction surveys, needs assessment, student progress reporting approaches, and action research)	5
• IEP linkage to standards and the general curriculum (e.g., information and training content, and strategies for alignment)	4
• Effective partnership strategies	4
• Miscellaneous products resulting from implementation of SIG project activities	4
• Coordinated and enhanced databases	4
• Accommodations, including instructional and assistive technology (e.g., information and training content)	3
• IEPs (e.g., options for infusing technology, fact sheets, and training content/modules)	3
• Partnership agreements	3
• Information about IDEA Amendments of 1997	3
• New and/or restructured preservice training programs	2
• Literacy training materials expectations and improved outcomes, including paperwork reduction)	2
• Coordinated services (e.g., information and training content, interagency accountability models, interagency agreements, and single plan formats)	2
• Leadership training content/formats for special education administrators and principals	2
• Electronic newsletters and toll-free hotlines	2
• Parent training content/modules	2
• Preservice course content	2
• Information about standards-based reform	1
• Training materials for Instructional Support Teams	1
• Revised and/or aligned policies and procedures to support high student	1
• Revised state certification standards	1
• Blueprint for restructured IHEs	1
• Integrated middle school curricula	1
• Guidelines and information about hearing impairments, visual impairments, and interpreters	1

Appendix D
Strategies to Implement SIG Goals and Strategies

Strategies	Number of States
• Implementation of professional development activities	17
• Development and implementation of recruitment and retention materials and activities	7
• Accountability efforts	6
• Agreements with colleges, universities, and UAPs	6
• Creative Dissemination Activities	6
• Efforts to study, re-design, or expand preservice training programs	5
• Research and evaluation in addition to SIG evaluation (e.g., action research, specialize research, evaluation of school refinements)	5
• Intensive support to LEAs (e.g., fiscal technical assistance, and training)	5
• Use of partnership to promote SIG agenda	4
• Infusion of technology into curriculum and instruction, including on-line academies	4
• Use of other grants and contracts to support SIG innovations	3
• Creation of special advisory and working groups to promote SIG agenda	3
• Use of existing advisory groups and task forces to promote SIG agenda	3
• Use of Continuous Improvement Grants to facilitate field training in LEAs	2
• Local planning aligned with SIG agenda including local partnership agreements	2
• Use of strategies to strengthen partnerships with business, vocational rehabilitation, and community-based organizations	2
• Alignment of curriculum, policies, and procedures between agencies	2
• Action and other field research	2
• Integration of training across and within existing statewide initiatives	2
• Recognizing good practices/programs with incentives and dissemination of success stories	2
• Parent/educator training activities	2
• Revision of state policies and procedures	2
• Modification of curriculum to align with IEPs and state standards	2
• Implementation of school-based services	2
• Improvement of certification programs (including reciprocity)	2
• Implementation of LEA/IHE linkages	2
• Use of expert consultants	2
• Development and use of recruitment materials	2
• Coordinating with policy making bodies (e.g., State Board of Education, Governor, and the legislature)	1
• Development of program guidelines related to SIG agenda	1
• Development of alternative assessments, protocols, information, and scoring procedures	1
• Funding to entities for specialized training	1
• Training of teacher support teams to promote promising practices	1
• Provision of integrated and coordinated training and technical assistance across agencies	1
• Expansion of existing training efforts in general education	1
• Redesign of certification programs	1
• Imbedding technology into transition	1
• Linking resource allocation to SIG agenda	
• Identification of core knowledge and competencies of paraprofessionals, teachers, and other personnel	1
• Expansion of existing training vehicles	1
• Use of teacher incentives	1
• Use of cooperative learning strategies, problem-based learning, and collaborative teaming	1
• Mentoring for training paraprofessionals	1
• Funding to entities for specialized training	1